



# 1997 Session Report to the Voters and Questionnaire

From  
Representative

**BILL  
REAMS**

48th District



Dear Friends,

Success is not just a destination, it is also a journey. Often times, big achievements are made through smaller successes along the way. Some of the most important legislation passed this year came as a result of years of work and smaller successes that have led to these achievements.

After 20 years in the works, the Legislature this year unanimously passed legislation that provides major needed reforms in our juvenile justice system.

For several years, we have been working to reform our state's welfare system. This year, thanks to the leadership of Rep. Suzette Cooke, comprehensive welfare reform was adopted. Part of that reform implements a change in the makeup of the Department of Social and Health Services, an issue I've been working with for several years.

In the past five years as your state representative, I've worked not only to change DSHS, but also to make government work better for you through implementation of regulatory reform and through better growth management planning. Many of these efforts have now begun to pay off. The journey of little successes is harvesting big achievements.

This newsletter provides information about some of those achievements and seeks your input as we continue down this path toward better, more efficient and responsive government for the people of the 48<sup>th</sup> District and Washington state.

Sincerely,

Rep. Bill Reams

## The 1997 Session — Benefits and Shortcomings

The 105-day session adjourned on schedule, April 27, the first time a budget session has not gone into overtime in 40 years.

### *Budget*

During the session, we passed a budget well below the state spending limit imposed by Initiative 601 that does not create any "bow waves" forcing future program cuts or tax increases. Our budget for 1997-99 is \$19.07 billion. That's the smallest state budget increase — 7.7 percent — since 1971. In the three years since Republicans gained a majority in the state House of Representatives, we have consistently held spending down. And by staying below the 601 lid, we reduce spending over time, providing a considerable savings for taxpayers.

### *Education*

We promised to properly fund education and we have kept our word. Our budget increases education funding by 7.5 percent over the biennium. Total spending on basic education is \$8.9 billion or 46 percent of the state budget. Among the education enhancements is \$20 million for education materials, which works out to \$458 for the average-size classroom, \$39 million for new education technology, authorization for levy equalization that will provide more money for districts that have approved their school levies, \$5 million for reading test and learning grants, and nearly \$41 million for student learning improvement grants. Also included is a 3 percent cost-of-living salary increase for teachers and school employees, and block grants allowing local districts to target educational needs.

In higher education, the budget provides an increase of \$187 million. We've increased enrollment at the University of Washington by 455 slots, and at the Bothell branch campus by an additional 210 slots. Community colleges, including Bellevue Community College, will benefit from additional enrollment funding. Financial aid to higher education is increased to \$27.8 million. Higher education employees will also receive a 3 percent salary increase.

### *Tax relief*

Although we made some gains toward providing future tax cuts, this is an area where I feel we could have done better, especially in providing additional property tax relief.

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# Representative BILL REAMS

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Overall, the Legislature cut \$411 million in state general fund taxes. This includes the completion of a rollback on business and occupation tax increases imposed in 1993 during the Lowry administration. It also includes \$220 million worth of property tax relief placed on the referendum ballot this fall.

Under that proposal, the 4.7 percent state levy reduction that we extended through 1997 would be made permanent. It would also limit property tax "spikes" that result from

unexpected assessment increases. Plus, it would limit property tax increases at both the state and local level.

While this relief may be a good start for property owners, I'm disappointed that more was not done to lift the burden from those paying sky-high property taxes. But again, small successes lead to larger achievements, and I'm hoping that will be the case with property tax relief. I plan to continue to work on this issue to provide lower property taxes without shifting the burden to others.

## Regulatory Reform — a long-term process

Back in 1993, I was one of several legislators who began making some serious efforts at changing the state's regulatory process. In response, Gov. Lowry appointed a Task Force on Regulatory Reform in August of 1993. I was one of the legislators who served on this task force which met over the course of 18 months.

From the task force recommendations, I introduced legislation in 1995 which was designed to slow the flow of new state regulations by establishing a criteria to be used for rule-making. Agencies were directed to provide technical assistance instead of imposing fines and we established a process for repealing obsolete or redundant agency rules.

Although Gov. Lowry vetoed several sections of the bill, enough remained to begin a good process of providing meaningful regulatory reform.

Continuing this momentum, last year I prime-sponsored House Bill 2221, another regulatory reform bill which attempted to deal with existing rules. It passed the House, but died in the Democrat-controlled Senate.

This year, with Republicans in control of both the House and Senate, I again introduced the legislation as House Bill 1032. After it passed and was being considered by the Senate, Gov. Locke responded by issuing an executive order requiring state agencies to do many things which were already in the bill.

One example of this is that each agency is required to begin a review of their existing rules which have a significant impact on business and the public in general. The review is expected to be completed by the year 2000.

Although the Legislature passed my regulatory reform bill this year, the governor vetoed certain sections such as some of the limitations on rule-making. Nevertheless, several victories through the journey we have taken with this issue over the past years have provided our state with significant regulatory reforms. I believe had it not been for my legislation in 1997 and previous years, Gov. Locke would not have issued his executive order on regulatory reform.

I plan to continue these efforts, especially toward ensuring that an ongoing review of existing rules be placed in statute.



*Rep. Bill Reams, chair of the House Government and Land Use Reform Committee, enjoys a moment during one of his committee meetings.*

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## Growth Management — making government responsible

If projections are accurate that Washington's population may grow by nearly 2 million people (many of those people coming to the Central Puget Sound region and King County), then it is essential that good planning be accomplished now. But it is also important that an element of common sense be woven into that planning.

Making the state's Growth Management Act (GMA) more responsive and responsible for our citizens at the local level was my major focus of the session. We passed 17 major GMA-related bills from the House this year. These bills were aimed at improving the GMA in several ways — but nearly all had similar goals. Those goals included: increasing local control and remedying problems the Act created from treating all counties the same, ensuring the affordability of homes in the future for middle-income families; providing better planning for location of new business, employment and housing in order to solve transportation problems; and increasing protection of private property rights. *(continued →)*

# '97 Report to the voters

(Growth Management continued)

In Kirkland, Bellevue and Redmond, the Growth Hearings Board has either challenged comprehensive plans or pressured city government into increasing the density in single-family neighborhoods. Many residents are upset because these changes could adversely affect lifestyle in local communities. This is why more local control is needed within GMA.

One of the main GMA bills I helped to write and guide through the Legislature, Senate Bill 6094, included provisions to provide more local control and better planning. It also

included recommendations by the Land Use Study Commission which had been charged by the Legislature to integrate Washington's land use and environmental laws into a single, manageable statute.

Although the measure passed the Legislature, many important parts were vetoed by the governor. Again, however, I believe we made progress with the provisions that were allowed to stand. I plan to continue to work with the governor to bring about further changes and flexibility needed within the Growth Management Act.

## 1997 Interim Questionnaire

Now that the 1997 session is complete, I am beginning to work on issues and legislation for next year's session. I'd like to know where you stand on several issues. Please take a moment to fill out the following survey. When you are finished, I would appreciate it if you would cut out the questionnaire, fold it, stamp it, and mail it to my office. Thank you for your time.

**1** During session, an increase in the state's gasoline tax was proposed to pay for increased highway capacity, add new ferries, relieve traffic congestion, and bring our transportation system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The proposal, however, met with opposition from citizens and legislators opposed to a tax increase, and was never brought to a vote. Would you support a gas tax increase to pay for improvements to our state's transportation system?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

**2** Several local comprehensive plans developed by cities in King County and also by the county have been challenged by the state's Growth Hearings Board. What is your opinion on the following growth management questions?

- ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree The state's Growth Management Act is working well and should not be changed
- ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree More flexibility and local control is needed within the Growth Management Act
- ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree For the most part, the Growth Hearings Boards are making the right decisions with regards to local comprehensive plans
- ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree The Growth Hearings Boards have outlived their usefulness and should be eliminated

**3** For the past four years, I have introduced legislation to reform the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Which statement best reflects your position?

- ☐ A. DSHS should be reformed into smaller, individual departments to address certain needs
- ☐ B. Changes are needed in DSHS, but breaking it into smaller departments is not the answer
- ☐ C. DSHS adequately serves the public and no changes are needed

**4** What other areas of state government or legislation interest you? Please use the following space to write down any comments, ideas, suggestions or concerns you might have about state government.

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Rep. Bill Reams  
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## Reforming DSHS

One of my major concerns during the time I have served as your state representative is how the government responds to the people it serves. I've especially been concerned about the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), which I believe has taken on too many functions over the years — so many that it cannot adequately serve the people's needs.

During the past four sessions, I've introduced legislation that would restructure DSHS into smaller agencies that could better address specific needs. This year, I reintroduced the measure, House Bill 1071, which sought to divide DSHS into four separate agencies. Those agencies included: a new Department of Medical Assistance, a new Department of Long-Term Care Services, a new Department of Employment Services, and a new Department of Children and Family Services.

Although my bill died in the House Appropriations Committee, portions of my work toward restructuring and

response were included in other bills which passed the Legislature.

House Bill 1850, which has been signed into law, restructures our state's long-term care system and requires DSHS to be more responsive toward the needs and safety of long-term care patients. This is certainly one success story from the work I began a few years ago.

Senate Bill 5710 more clearly defines the role of Child Protective Services and further reforms the way DSHS provides services. Again, this is another success story which originated with DSHS restructuring.

Finally, the welfare reform bill which passed the Legislature will incorporate a number of changes in DSHS — particularly in their direction toward training of recipients for jobs.

I plan to continue my work to ensure that DSHS and all state government is responsive toward the needs of Washington's citizens.

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